DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 304 747 EA 020 720

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TITLE Implementing Change: Programs and Strategies That Work.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Busing; Compliance (Legal); Court Litigation; *Desegregation Methods; *Desegregation Plans; Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; Magnet Schools; Neighborhood Schools; Parent Participation; Participative Decision Making; Problem Solving; *Racial Integration; *School Desegregation; *School District Reorganization
IDENTIFIERS *Buffalo Public Schools NY

ABSTRACT

In 1976, U.S. District Court Judge John T. Curtin issued a court order stating that the Buffalo Board of Education, the superintendent of schools, the commissioner of education, and the New York State Board of Regents were guilty of de jure segregation. This decision led to a complete restructuring of the instructional program and a racial and ethnic redistribution of Buffalo public school students. This document recounts the events leading up to Judge Curtin's historic court order, and the creative restructuring process that followed within the Buffalo public schools. The architects of the desegregation scheme provided two vital ingredients in each phase of the process: (1) inclusion of parents in the processes of developing, explaining, and selling; and (2) quality control to ensure that if a bus ride became necessary, something good--such as early childhood centers, magnet schools, or academies--was waiting at the other end. The plan was so successful that many parents with children in private schools reenrolled them in the public school system. The appendix includes charts and graphs showing student improvement 1983-87. (TE)

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IMPLEMENTING CHANGE:

PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES THAT WORK

Joseph T. Murray
Associate Superintendent
for Instructional Services

Buffalo Public Schools

In the beginning was the word, and the word was from the Honorable John T. Curtin, U.S. District Court, Western District. The word, via court order, was delivered on April 30, 1976, and it was unmistakably clear. It said that the Buffalo Board of Education, the Superintendent of Schools, the Commissioner of Education, and the New York State Board of Regents were guilty of de jure segregation. This wasn't really the beginning. Nothing, and especially a massive desegregation program, is that simple. In 1964, several Buffalo parents, on behalf of their children, filed an appeal with the Commissioner of Education, charging that the Buffalo Public Schools were racially unbalanced and that the Board of Education refused to alleviate the unbalance. This appeal, to become known as the Yerby Dixon Case, was upheld by the Commissioner, who then ordered the Board of Education to prepare a plan by May, 1965, which would provide for the progressive elimination of racial imbalance in the Buffalo schools.

What followed was a long, tortuous, and largely indecisive series of actions and counteractions taken by the then appointed Board of Education and the then Commissioner of Education, James Allen. The Board, which had gone on

EA 020 780

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 5-9, 1988.

record in opposition to transporting white students to non-white neighborhoods, was told by Commissioner James Allen and later by his successor, Ewald Nyquist, that little actual integration had been effected. In January, 1972, Dr. Nyquist ordered a new approach and drew up two plans to desegregate the city's schools. These were submitted to the Board in November, 1972, with a request for a response by January, 1973. After the Board rejected the state plans, the Commissioner had a show cause order drafted in August, 1973. When the U.S. District court case began on October 2, 1974, the order had not been served.

Judge Curtin's court order of April, 1976, was initially viewed by many Buffalonians as a millstone around our collective necks. It turned out to be a milestone which marked the road to a complete restructuring of the instructional program, and the racial and ethnic redistribution of Buffalo public school students. Looking back at the successive steps or phases in the Buffalo plan, it looks easy. It wasn't easy, but it was a bloodless, relatively unemotional, and with some justifiable hyperbole, a comparatively smooth transition.

An elected Board of Education took over from the appointed one on July 1, 1975. The District, at this time, was losing thousands of pupils per year. Many middle-class, both majority and minority, fled to the suburbs or to private or parochial schools. The District's reading and mathematics scores were among the lowest in New York State.

Low morale permeated the schools' staff. War stories were told about what was going on in the schools, inflating problems well beyond what they were. The result was a school system in decay, lacking quality and the will to change.

Traditional types of racial balance techniques were proposed by plaintiffs, the state, and other outside experts. The newly elected Board of Education chose to design an educational plan that would desegregate the schools.

Each school community was required to develop a plan which would desegregate their school. From these plans came school closings, early childhood centers, academies, magnet schools, and a grade restructuring which called for the elimination of junior high schools and middle schools. In putting the excellent ideas of the parents into an overall desegregation plan for the city, we were able to use the excellent institutions and resources available in the city. Colleges, universities, zoological gardens, and science museums were used to enhance our program. Rather than reinvent the wheel, the District has creatively stolen from the National Diffusion Network (NDN). This allowed us to pick and choose outstanding programs from around the country and modify them to our needs in the Buffalo district. It also allowed us to inservice our teachers and give our parents quick response to their requests.

Majority parents responded by voluntarily busing their children to magnet schools that were placed in previously minority schools. Large, under-utilized minority schools were chosen for magnets so that the resident populations would not be displaced. A new science school was placed on the zoological grounds, another adjacent to the science museum. Others were placed on college campuses, and still others were placed in former junior high schools emptied by the parents' request for a pre-K through 8 school system. Teachers were thoroughly inserviced so that we kept to the fidelty of the design of our magnet plan. For example, the Buffalo's Bennett Park Montessori school not only has every teacher a certified montessorian, but the school itself is certified by the American Montessori Association.

The results of this quality integrated educational program have been impressive. See appendix A. Reading and math scores for minority and majority students have soared. Attendance is up to 91.7%. Dropout rate is 4.7%, well below the state average, with no disproportion between minority and majority students. Suspensions of African-American males have been cut in half and referrals of minority students to the Committee on Special Education have been reduced. The community recognizes that quality has returned to the Buffalo schools through our desegregation efforts. The Buffalo School District boasts 10 schools of excellence. Respective homeowners no longer shun the city because of poor schools. One of the hottest markets in Western New

York is the City of Buffalo itself. This past year, enrollment increased by 1,032 students as parents who previously had children enrolled in private and parochial schools chose the Buffalo Public Schools.

So much for the scenario - what about the players in the twelve year pageant? There have been players a'plenty - heroes, heroines, heavies, character actors, bit parts, and, if not ingenues, some fairly disingenuous actors.

The largest and most intimately involved persons were, of course, the parents of school-age children. Fighting back a natural temptation to generalize too broadly, it is certainly safe - and accurate - to say that the parents of Buffalo responded beautifully. There were vocal and vociferous critics from beginning to end, but their opposition was verbal, contained and non-violent. The absence of the kind of destructive and explosive resistance seen in other cities was noted by many observers of the Buffalo desegregation scene. The reasons therefor, offered by both administrators and parents, seem almost simplistic and self-serving, but, given the potential for trouble that existed, it must be the explanation. The architects of the desegregation schema were careful to provide the same two vital ingredients in each step and phase of the total process - one was a complete and almost exhaustive inclusion of parents in the processes of developing, explaining and selling; the other was a very careful quality control to insure that if a bus ride became necessary, something good - in the form of Early Childhood Centers, Magnet Schools or Academies - was waiting for the child

when the bus got to the end of the line.

Continued, indeed constant, community involvement marked each step from Phase I to Phase IIIx. Before plans were developed for each phase, meetings were held in all districts in the city - at these meetings, parents and all interested citizens, including plaintiffs, were given the opportunity to speak and have input. From these meetings - 48 school meetings for Phase III alone - a significant part of the total desegregation plan evolved. As each phase became operational, Buffalo parents found that they liked what they saw and what their children were experiencing. Not only did the parents of pupils already in the Buffalo Public Schools like the new magnets, Early Childhood Centers and Academies, but parents whose children were in private educational settings were also won over - and in substantial numbers. In 1981 alone, some 422 students transferred from private schools - in the previous four years, some 1155 private school students made the switch. There are now some 140 suburban students on waiting lists for admission to magnet schools and Early Childhood Centers.

The promotional activities for the various desegregation phases are solid testimonials to the fact that it pays to advertise - if you have a good product to sell. The Magnet schools, Early Childhood Centers and Academies all proved to be extremely saleable commodities, were widely advertised, and were accepted by a gratifyingly responsive public.

For openers, an information center was set up in the City Hall administrative offices. The center consisted of five telephone lines manned by central office administrators who

answered requests for information and explained the program as it was unfolded.

To make Phase I and successive phases of the plan known, the local media cooperated fully, generously and effectively. In the Phase I magnet school campaign, a kickoff luncheon was hosted by top school staff. Local T.V. and radio executives and personalities were invited and were introduced to the magnet school concept by top staffers. Thirty and sixty second T.V. and radio spots, featuring the magnet school story, were distributed. The luncheon and the magnet presentation were both eminently successful because the magnets were endorsed and pushed hard by all the local radio stations and T.V. channels. Media coverage was a tremendous lift because, as a result of saturation airing, applications began to come in - at first slowly and then in steadily rising numbers. Not the least significant factor was the "adoption" of individual magnets by popular radio personalities. While the radio and T.V. spots highlighted the magnets, the details were supplied by Board members and staffers who appeared or spoke on no fewer than forty different T.V. and radio talk shows, panel presentations and current issues shows. To make sure that no one missed the message, fifteen billboards carried the message as did placards on the sides of some 200 Niagara Frontier Metro buses.

Six community meetings - sited at six of our high schools - were set up. These featured color film slide presentations on each of the nine magnets. A twelve page newspaper supplement,

explaining the magnet school concept in general and each magnet in detail, was published, sent to every Buffalo Public School child's home, distributed at the community meetings and made available in food stores, libraries, banks and shopping malls.

Both of the large daily papers did a yeoman job - the Buffalo Evening News and the Buffalo Courier Express each ran a series of nine articles - one on each magnet. Before the Phase II campaign was over, some two hundred articles had been written about its progress and public reaction thereto. The Buffalo Sabres hockey organization provided one of the magnets with free ice time for its hockey team, complete hockey outfits and radio and T.V. spots. The Chamber of Commerce came through with a well publicized "magnet school" breakfast and the magnet story was told - via video tape - at shopping malls and art festivals.

In summary, the media response was magnificent and virtually a sine qua non for the campaign. In all modesty, the product was eminently saleable but the fact is that the local media people brought the seller and the consumer together. When the media blitz ended, seven of the magnets had a majority-minority balance. Three of them lagged, as noted earlier, but were given additional time by the court and made it.

The same promotional techniques used for the magnets were refined and used again for the Early Childhood Centers in Phase III and the Buffalo Academies in Phase IIIx - and with the same happy results. The inner city schools earlier were considered unintegratable, and the peripheral schools, long

considered as white bastions, were integrated and met the court guidelines for desegregation.

The continuing close involvement of the community has been one of the most critical elements in Buffalo's Desegregation Plan. From day one to the present, parents have been able to indicate their options. Phase III's forty-eight community input meetings probably holds the record - from these meetings, forty-eight sets of proposals were submitted to the Board and staff for review as possible components for Phase III. Many of the suggestions were consolidated into staff and Board recommendations. The meetings held were monitored by plaintiffs, the court-appointed Citizen Commission on School Desegregation, the Buffalo Teachers Federation, the Citizens for Quality Education Project, the School Integration Advisory Committee, and district councilmen. The issues were aired, exceptions noted, feasibility scrutinized and the most promising suggestions were melded into the staff-community plan.

Just as no one is sure how many Chinese there are in China, we really don't know the total number of community input meetings wee held before, during and after Phases I, II, III, and IIIx. Despite careful records - and, very often, taped transcriptions for court - we can only estimate that the official, planned meetings plus the smaller, unofficial get-togethers total over 400. The parent's questions and suggestions were, predictably, focused on bus safety, the effect of busing on quality of education, illness and accidents in "far-away" schools, the wisdom of putting magnet schools and E.C.C.'s in minority

neighborhoods, and the right of the Court to move children against the parents'wishes. The "neighborhood" school, also predictably, received a resounding round of applause, as did "voluntary" busing. The usual coterie of smoke screeners raised cries of "applehood and motherpie." To their sempiternal credit, however, the solid majority of the parents listened, quizzed, objected, put forth alternatives - and, ultimately, accepted. Their prudence and good sense resulted in a reluctant but steadily growing acceptance of the plan and made desegregation happen. Fortunately, the federal judge in the case, the aforementioned John T. Curtin, was patient, open-minded and willing to be convinced. While keeping a judicious eye on the time frame, he endorsed the voluntarism and new educational directions proposed. By giving the various phases of the plan the breathing space they needed, the judge saw his confidence rewarded. The plan, which would have been destroyed by impatience with its initial inevitable glitches, was allowed to take shape and ultimately, to succeed.

APPENDIX A

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

City Honors School's Distributive Education Club members won thirty-nine awards during the DEC of Western New York regional competition held at Buffalo State College on January 24th. City Honors received the largest number of awards sweeping eight categories in the competition.

Erica Pugh, BAVPA sophomore, was second place winner ($ 725.00) in the State finals of the Martin Luther King Jr. Arts and Science Competition. Erica competed in the "Elocution" category in Albany on December 12, 1987.

Sheenia Gaines, Riverside H. S. junior, was winner of the BPS Senior High School Speaking Contest held at Lafayette H.S. during December.

Lisa Lynn Walk, Hutch-Tech senior, and Eugene Pinkard, City Honors, senior, were recipients of the Dr. Joseph Manch - NCCJ Brotherhood/Sisterhood Incentive Scholarship during the annual Brotherhood/Sisterhood luncheon held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on February 18th.

North Park Academy students placed second in the Super Duper Speller competition sponsored by the American Lung Association. Their efforts produced $1,510.60 for the Association's anti-smoking, anti-drug drive. Shelley Sittniewski, health educator at NPA, coordinated the school project.

Eugene Pinkard Jr. and Woinam Tereffe of City Honors have been named finalists in the 1988 competition by the National Achievement Scholarship Program for Outstanding Negro Students.

City Honors students, Charles Lambros, Inga Malejs and Julie Huberman were selected to perform with the Greater Buffalo Youth Orchestra.

DID YOU KNOW THAT :

Cassandra Daniels, City Honors senior was winner of the Erie Country Championship - American Legion Oratorical Contest. The win was the second consecutive for Cassandra and the fourth consecutive for City Honors.

Marc Johnston, Kensington High School whose "program solution" was chosen for publication in a recent newsletter of the American Computer Science League. "Marc has been a cornerstone of the Ken programming team for the last two years," according to instructor Ron·Astridge. Last year the team was invited to represent the Upstate New York area in the Intermediate Division All-Star Contest in Washington, D.C.

Members of the **BAVPA Senior Chorale** performed for the Inauguration Ceremonies of the Buffalo Common Council on New Year's Day.

Robert Patterson, BAVPA, was third place winner in music competition during the National Arts Recognition and Talent Search competition held in Miami, Florida during January. The competition involved 5,768 students nationwide, with 93 finalists competing in Miami.

Buffalo's Academy for **Visual & Performing Arts,** was declared third place winner in the State finals of the Martin Luther King Arts & Science competition held in Albany, N.Y. on December 15 and 16. **Jodi Phillips, Connie Wilson, Tabitha Meeks, Tracey Webb** and **Gino Marron** performed a modern dance "To the Mountaintop" under direction of Ms. Yvonne James-Brown, Dance Department Chairperson.

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

Hutch Tech Cheerleaders placed second among the thirteen teams competing in the New York State Cheerleading Championships held in Syracuse, N.Y. during December. The achievement marked the highest ever for a Buffalo Public School in the Varsity Division. Ms. Kathy LaFoorce is faculty advisor.

Melissa Dietz, Allen Gang and Mary Shannon of South Park High School have been selected for listing in Who's Who Among American High School Students.

Patricia Salomon, South Park H.S., senior has been granted a full Computer Programming scholarship for Bryant and Stratton Institute. Patricia earned first place in county-wide competition. The eighteen month program will provide an Associate Degree and background for entrance into Niagara University where she will pursue a baccalaureate in computer programming.

Erin Wesling and **Christopher Manly** (and their faculty advisor, Mrs. Mildred Saltzman) of **City Honors**, had project "Better Motor with a Bit More Wire" selected as a Round I winner in the 7th Annual Student Energy Research Competition sponsored by the N.Y. State Energy Research and Development Authority and State Energy Office.

Susan F. Frensch, sophomore at **McKinley H.S.**, was named Buffalo News Carrier and New York State Outstanding Carrier of the Year. Susan also was awarded the Scholastic Journalist Award by the American Newspaper Publishers' Association. Susan is the daughter of Mr. Peter Frensch, Special Ed teacher at P.S. #19.

Marlo Levy (first place), 10th grader and **Keith Krohn (grand winner, 10th - 12th grade category)** in the W.N.Y. United Against Drug and Alcohol Abuse Essay Contest. Both are students at **B.A.V.P.A.**, where Ms. Patricia Roth is their creative writing instructor.

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

Randy Monterro, Campus East; Sandy Arcury, Riverside Academy; and Manuel Rivera, School 31 were 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners respectively in the N.C.C.J. Brotherhood/Sisterhood poster contest.

City Honors students **Alexander T. DesForges, Wesley Gamble, Frances J. Poodry** and **Yoram A. Pulus** have been named finalists in the 1988 competition for Merit Scholarships.

Thomas Brunner, School #4, 8th grader was recipient of a $50.00 Savings Bond presented by the Law Enforcement Association of Western New York for his poster, "Shoplifters Never Win." Thomas received his award during November 17 ceremonies in Main Place Mall.

Arlicia Baker and **Seandrea Curuth of Roosevelt Academy** art work merited Honorable Mention among 5th and 6th grade contestants participating in The Council of International Institute of Buffalo, New York, Inc.'s Art Contest. More than seventy students represented twelve schools.

Angie Dulak, Lisa Serafin, Liz Walgate and **Bridge Ronaghen,** members of the McKinley H.S. **Forestry Team** placed 25th in the national F.F.A. Forestry Contest held in Kansas City, Missouri during November. Mr. Douglas Wright is the team coach.

City Honors seniors: **Brandon Bryant, Lyneve Foster, Tabitha Jenkins, Darrell Jones, Scott Melendez, Patrice Miles, Edward Wallace** and Jason Younger are among 3,000 Achievement Program participants being commended to some 1,300 U.S. institutions of higher education by the National Achievement Scholarship Program for Outstanding Negro Students.

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

Maggie Velasquez of South Park H.S. outstanding success as a student employee with the City of Buffalo Summer Youth Employment Program where she assisted in the Department of Human Resources medical unit as an interpreter for Spanish-speaking patients.

Philip Krayna (best photographer) and Amos Edelman (best columnist) were selected as recipients of awards indicated from the Empire State Press Associatin. Both are students at **City Honors.**

Students from Buffalo's **Waterfront School and School 59 Science Magnet-Zoo Component** were first and third place winners respectively among 36 participating schools in the SCIENCE AT SEM competition held during October at the Buffalo Seminary.

Kevin Zarkovich of South Park H.S., daily volunteer services and dedication to the patients of Our Lady Victory Hospital, has won the praise of the nurses and staff members of BT4 unit.

Jeffrey Space, Emerson H.S. senior, was selected among 5% of the nation's top students to be listed in the Who's Who of American Students. Jeff is studying culinary arts and plans to attend the Culinary Arts Institute of America (New York City) in the fall.

Keith Krempa and Joseph Grega, South Park H.S. seniors were selected as participants in the American Legion Boys State Program held during the past summer at LeMoyne College in Syracuse.

Maria Scott of City Honors has been selected by the State Education Department Bureau of Social Studies Education as one of the eleven semifinalists in competition for N.Y. State delegates to the U.S. Senate Youth Program.

DID YOU KNOW THAT:

Tamara Goforth, Audrey Hawkins, Mark Judge, Jason Kay and **Shelline Peays of Futures Academy** received honorable mention in the arts competition conducted by the Ball Committee of the International Institute Council.

Graciella Gutierrez fifth grade student at **Herman Badillo Academy** was among award winners in the Statewide Spanish Spelling Bee held in Albany, N.Y. during June '87.

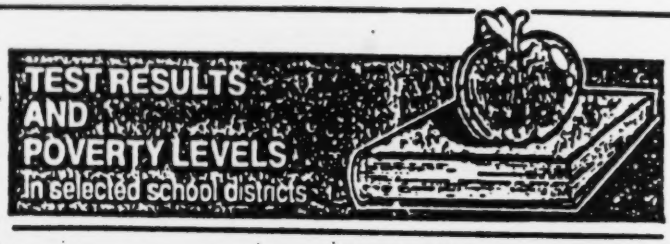
Hutchinson Technical students won the regional competition commemorating the Bicentennial of the Constitution of the United States. The program involved students from six area high schools.

Daryl Strickland of **Waterfront School** won the Seventh Grade competition (to build a structure at least one meter tall) that supported 452.5 grams. **Aleksandr Stefaniak** of **Waterfront School** won the Eighth Grade competition with a tower that held 427.5 grams.

Campus East and **School #64** were named New York State Schools of Excellence. They now join Frederick Law Olmsted #56, West Hertel Academy, ECC #54, Futures Academy, Houghton Academy, Science Magnet, ECC #78 and North Park Academy as Schools of Excellence.

School 80's, Donna Moffat was selected recently not only as the 1986-87 Buffalo Public School's Teacher of the Year, but also was named New York State Teacher of the Year. She is now one of four finalist for the National Teacher of the Year Award.

The State Education Department, in an article published by the Albany Times Union, reported that Buffalo was the highest in the poverty level index and the highest of the large five cities in pupil achievement.



DISTRICT	RANK	% PASSING PEP TESTS*	% In LUNCH PROGRAMS**
Wyandanch (Suffolk County)	1	58.4	65.30
New York City	2	60.2	61.15
Poughkeepsie	3	64.4	53.17
Yonkers	4	65.8	37.76
Jefferson (Sullivan County)	5	69.4	46.87
Hancock (Delaware County)	6	70.7	40.05
Syracuse	7	72.5	53.22
Border City (Seneca County)	8	72.6	52.94
Roosevelt (Nassau County)	9	72.7	51.86
Amityville (Suffolk County)	10	73.0	33.48
Rochester	11	73.4	52.17
Troy	17	75.6	38.03
Rensselaer	30	79.2	39.06
Green Island	42	80.8	None
Schenectady	44	80.8	None
Albany	51	81.3	48.95
Watervliet	68	82.3	33.38
Buffalo	74	82.5	72.66
Hudson	108	84.0	36.37
Catskill	119	84.3	24.32
Wynantskill	138	84.9	7.65

Source: State Education Department
*Percentage of students who passed PEP tests in the 1985-86 and 1986-87 schools years.
**Percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches.

Times Union 1/11/88

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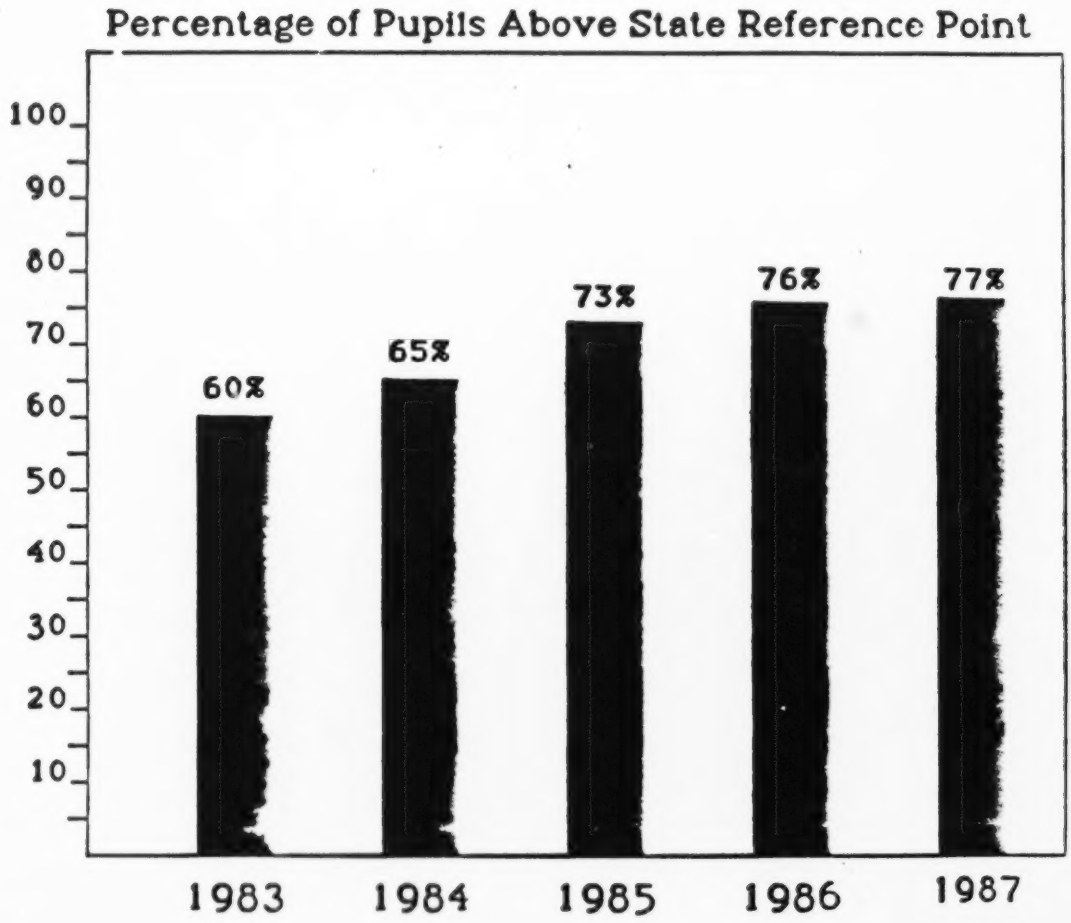
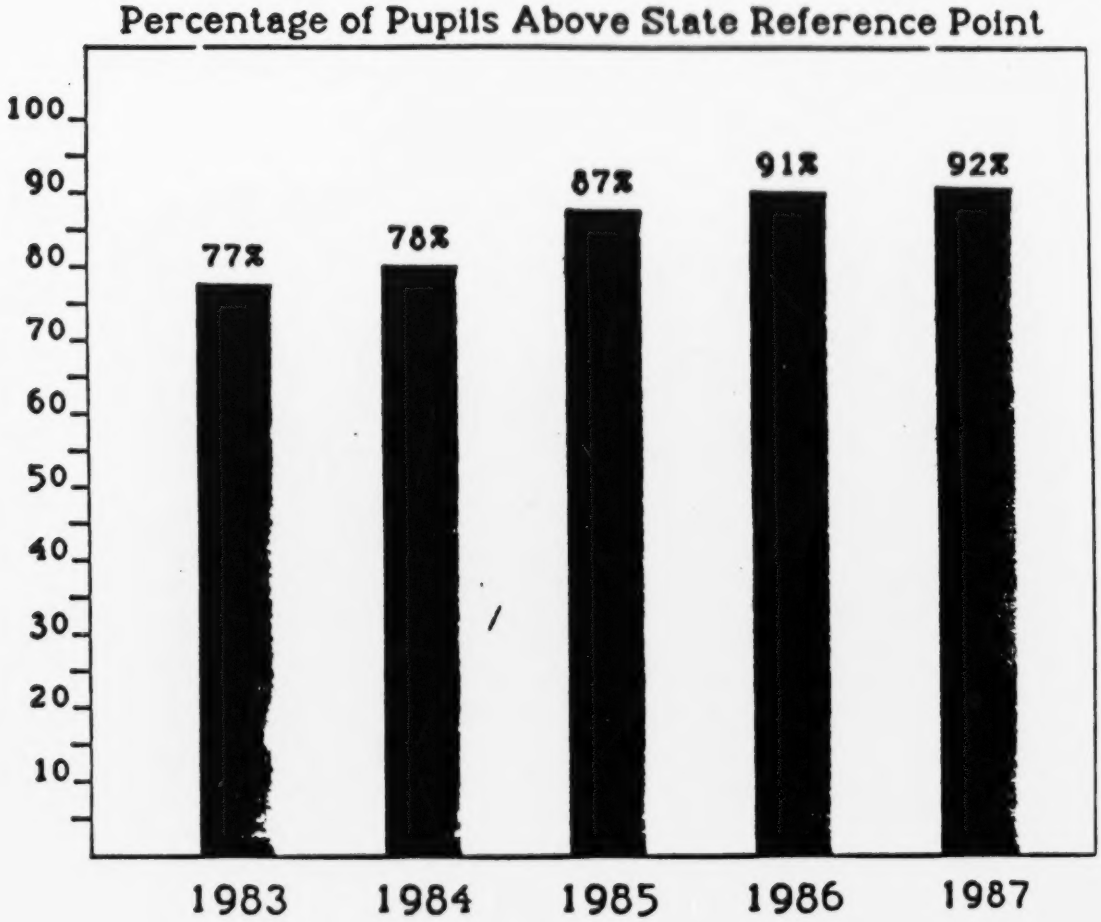
Pupil Evaluation Program
Reading - Grade 3



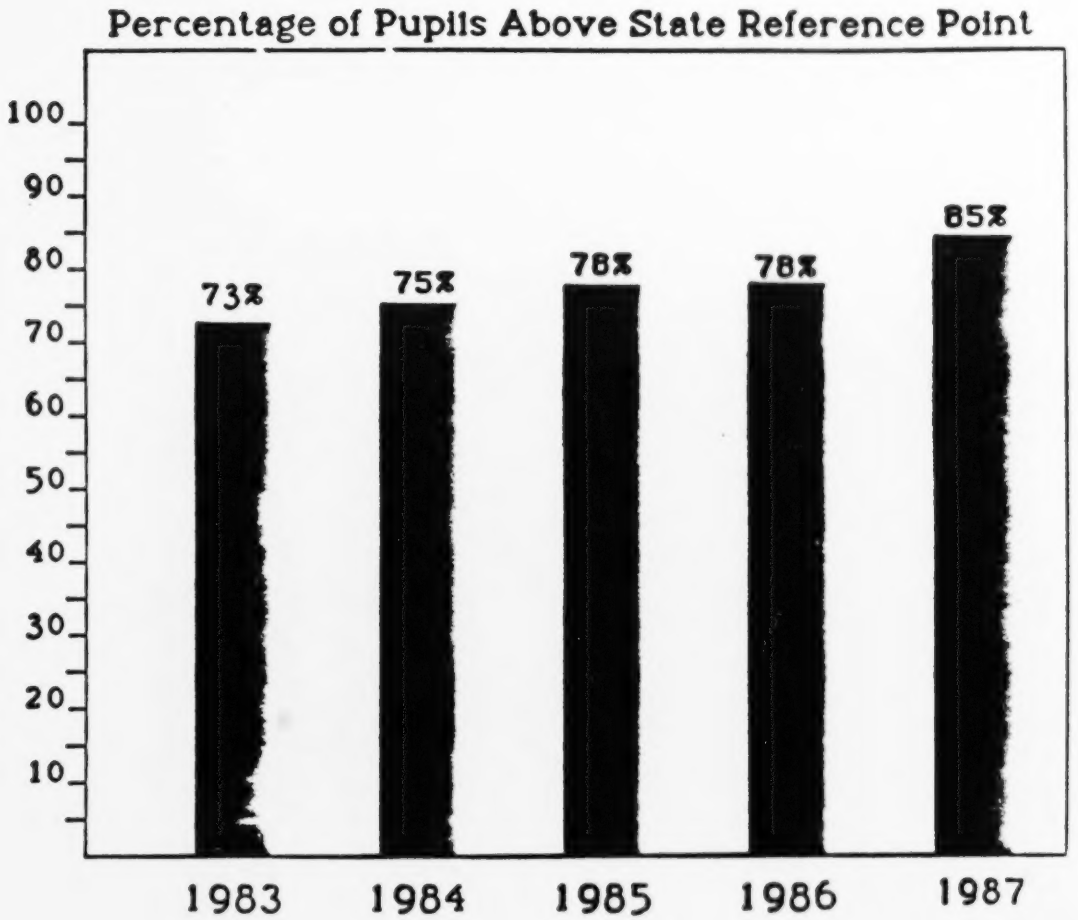
28.3% Improvement in 5 Years

Pupil Evaluation Program
Mathematics - Grade 3



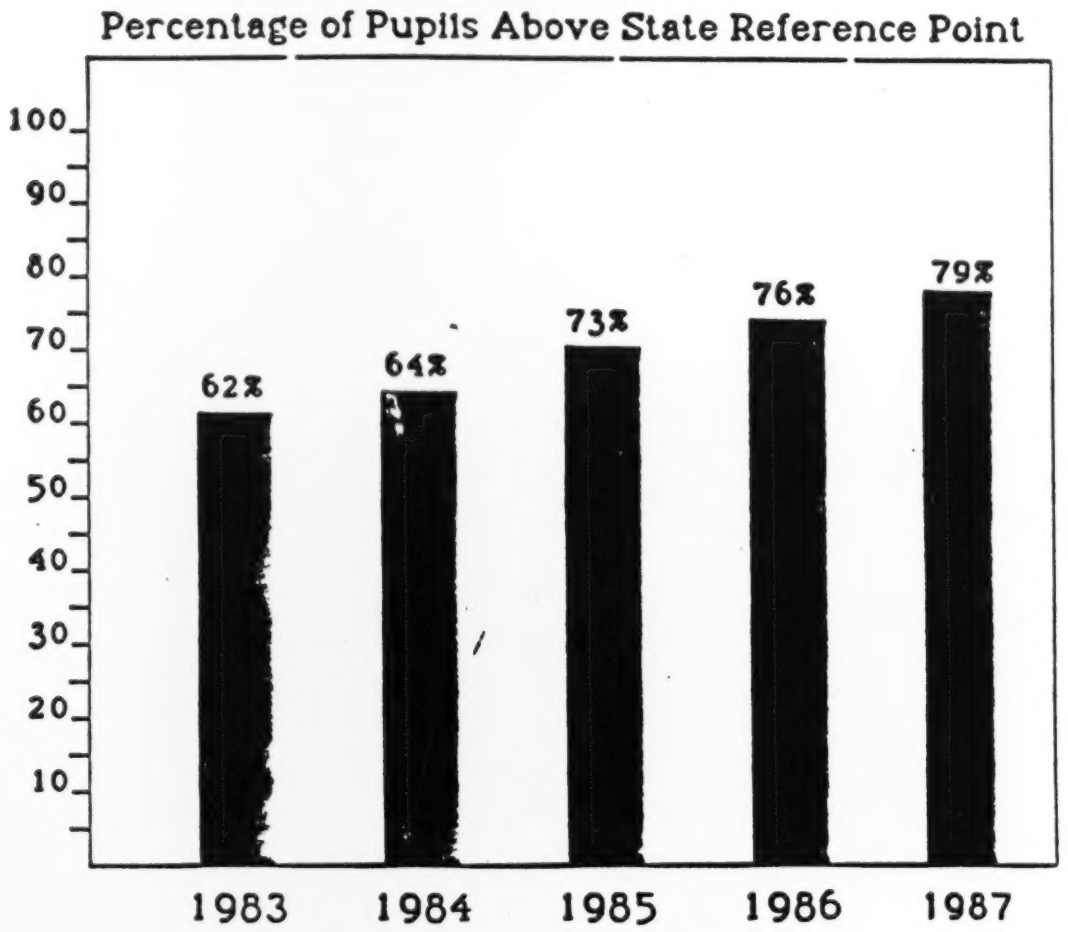
19.5% Improvement in 5 Years

Pupil Evaluation Program
Writing - Grade 5



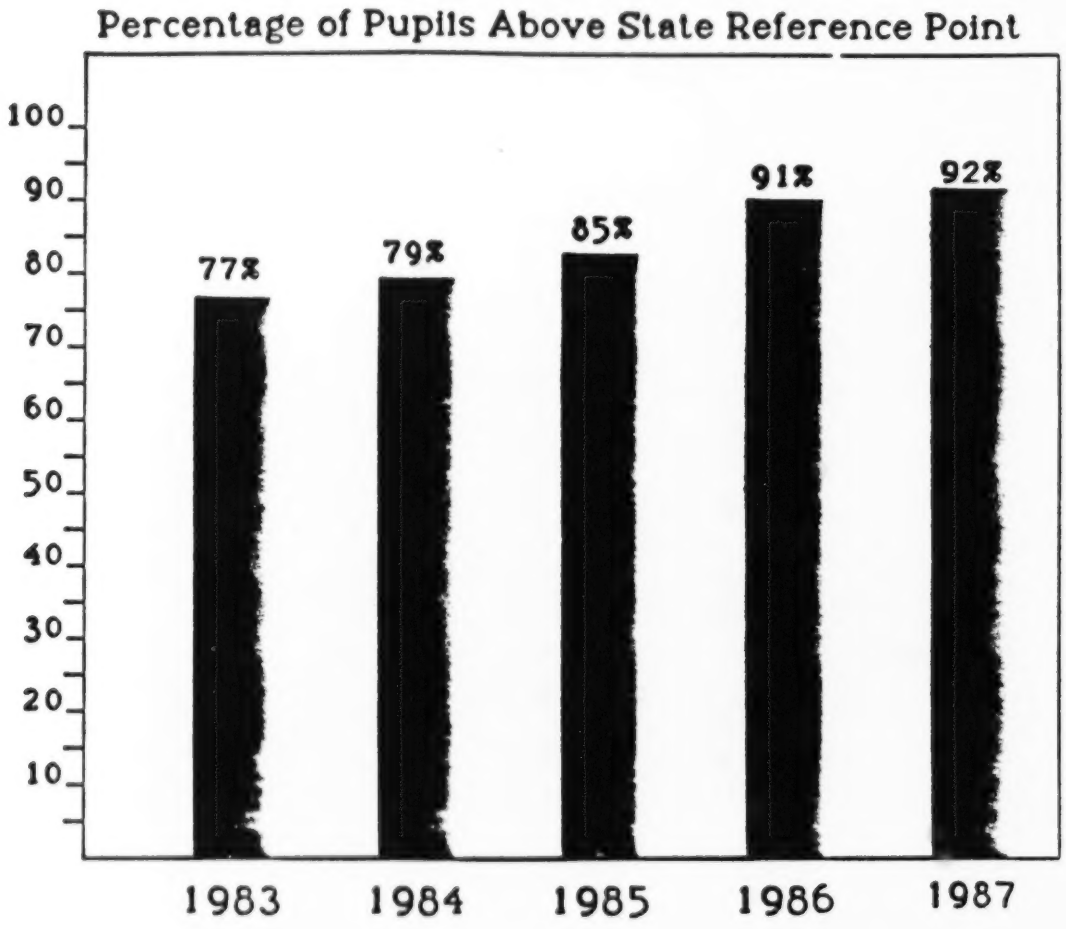
16.4% Improvement in 5 Years

Pupil Evaluation Program
Reading - Grade 6



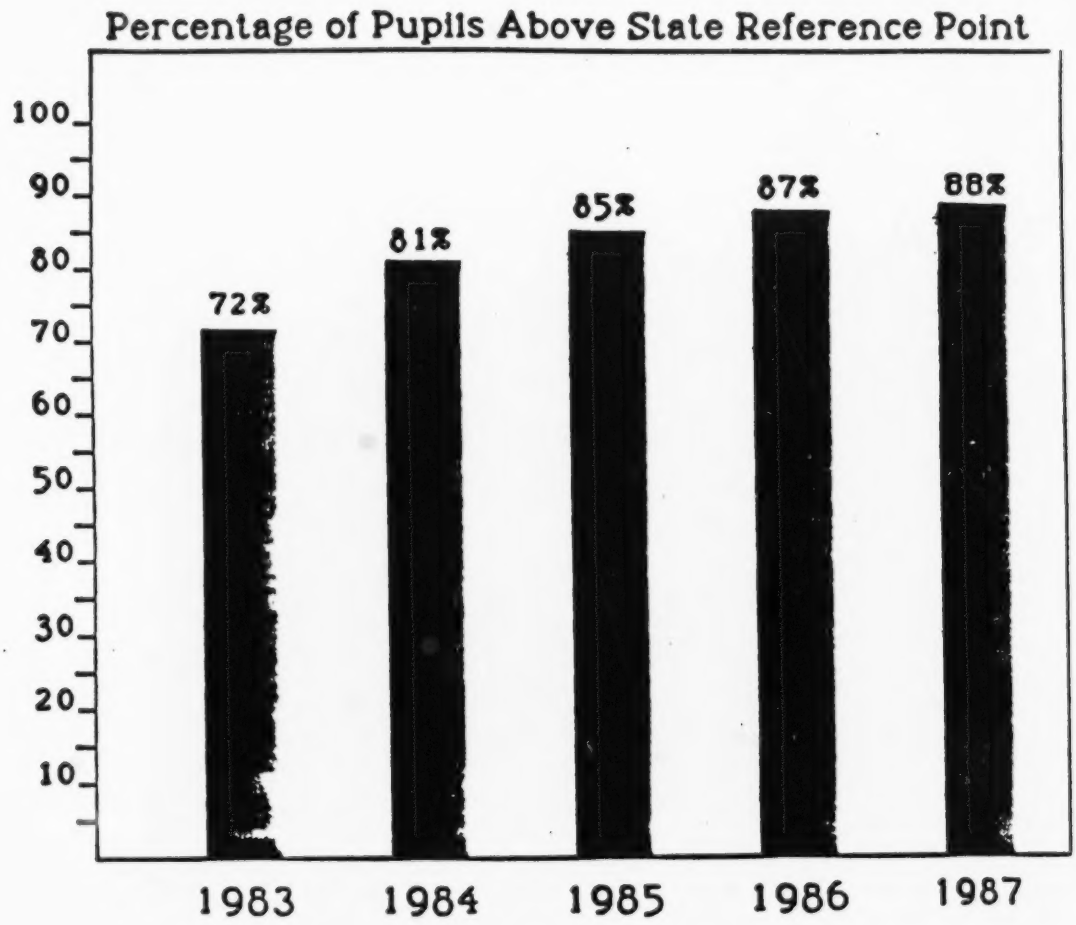
27.4% Improvement in 5 Years

Pupil Evaluation Program
Mathematics - Grade 6



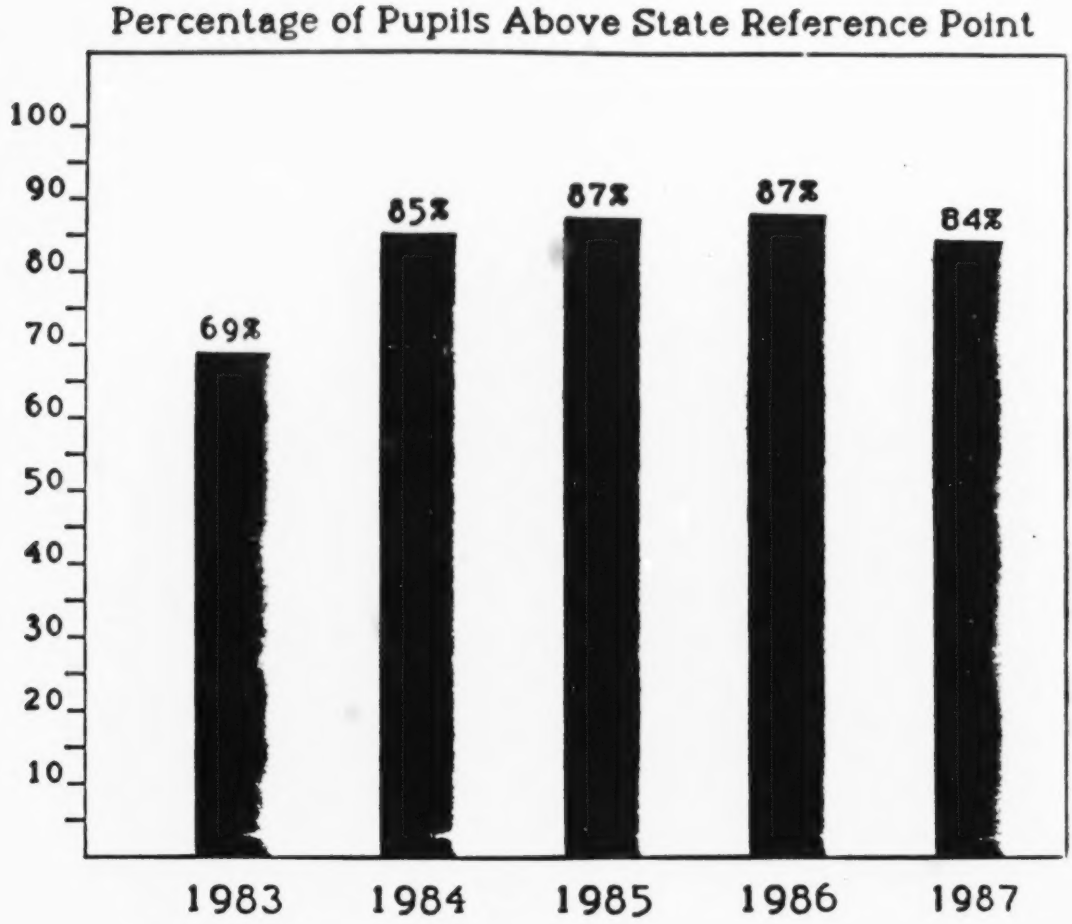
19.5% Improvement in 5 Years

Preliminary Competency Test
Reading - Grade 8



22.2% Improvement in 5 Years

Preliminary Competency Test
Writing - Grade 8



21.7% Improvement in 5 Years

New York State Mandated Achievement Tests
Grades 3-8

Buffalo Public Schools District Summary

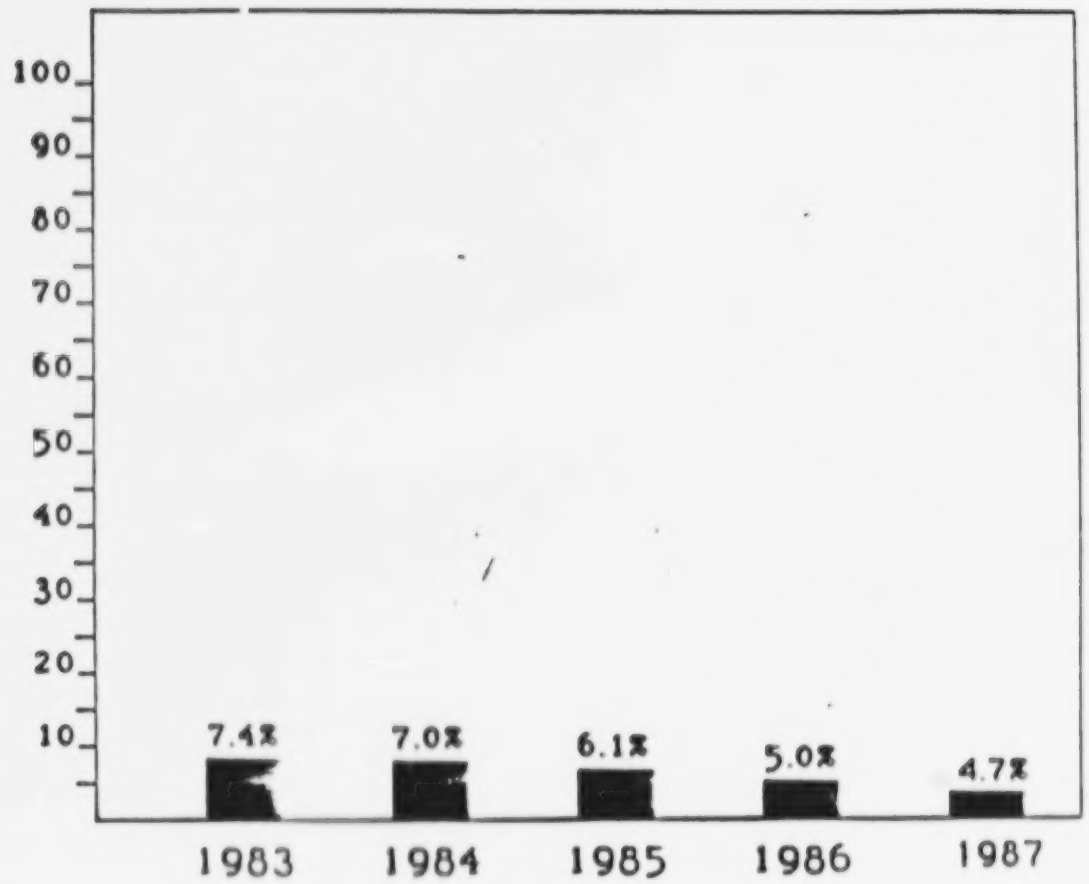
	School Year				
	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86	86-87
Name of Test	Percentage of Pupils Above State Reference Point				
Reading Gr. 3	60%	65%	73%	76%	77%
Reading Gr. 6	62%	64%	73%	76%	79%
Math Gr. 3	77%	78%	87%	91%	92%
Math Gr. 6	77%	79%	85%	91%	92%
Writing Gr. 5	73%	75%	78%	78%	85%
Writing Gr. 8	69%	85%	86%	86%	84%

Average Percentage of Improvement + 15.2%

A Comparison of Achievement Test Scores for the 1975-76 and 1986-87 School Years

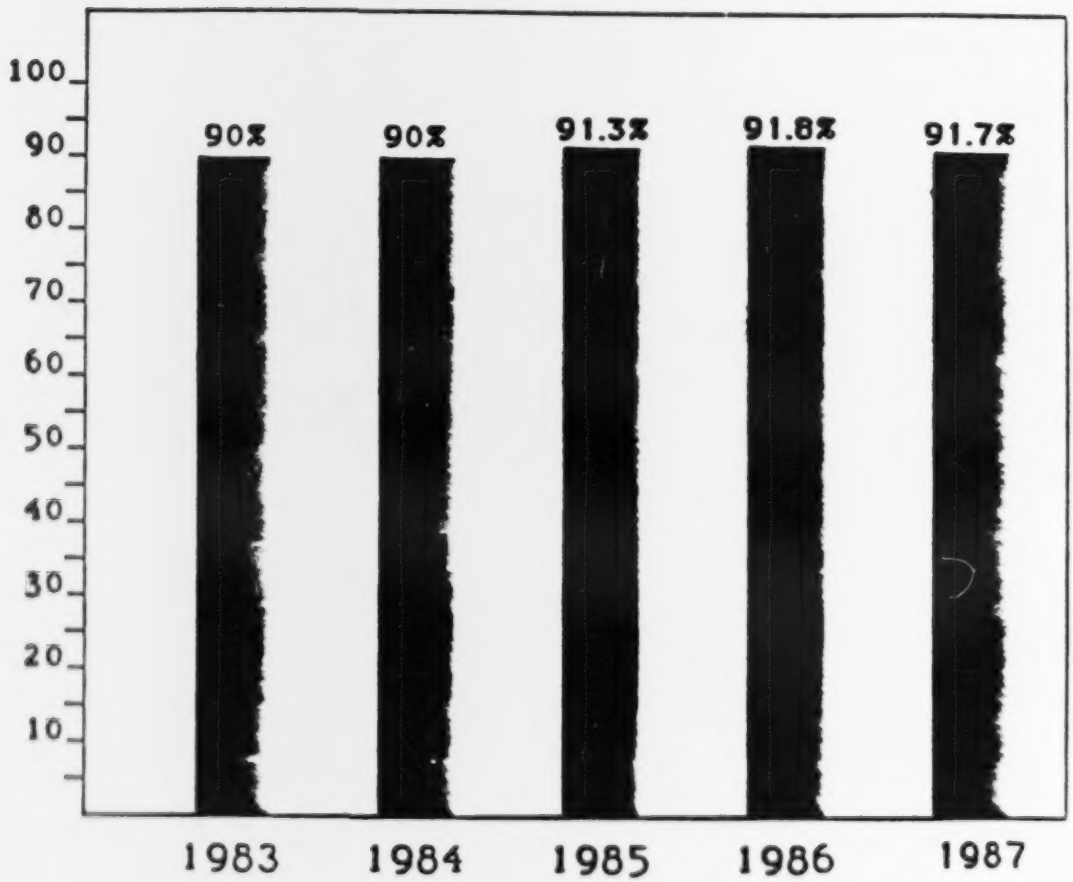
Name of Test	1975-76	1986-87	% Change
	% of Pupils Above State Reference Point		
Reading - Grade 3	68%	77%	+ 13.2
Reading - Grade 6	53%	79%	+ 49.0
Mathematics - Grade 3	78%	92%	+ 17.9
Mathematics - Grade 6	54%	92%	+ 70.4

District Dropout Rate



36.5% Improvement in 5 Years

District Attendance Rate



1.9% Improvement in 5 Years